



Skaneateles Central School District

Nationally Recognized for Excellence
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Dear Skaneateles family,

I am reaching out with important updates regarding our ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as both a school district and a region. This week we saw the single greatest jump in COVID-19 cases in Onondaga County since the start of the pandemic. As we head into the winter months, doors and windows are closing and people throughout our region are spending more time indoors and in closer contact. As we are already seeing numbers of infections increase, we must do everything we can to protect our school community and preserve everything we have built at Skaneateles so far this year. To that end, we are clarifying our position on mandatory mask wearing at Skaneateles Schools.

Skaneateles Central Schools is one of only a few districts throughout our entire region to provide daily in person instruction to all students in grades K-7. This model was founded on our belief that in-person instruction is superior to virtual learning and those critical relationships formed at school are best cultivated in person. We responded to our community's desire to have as many children as possible back in school and we have invested heavily in making this vision a reality this year for grades K-7. As we continue to work towards increasing in-person instruction time for students in grades 8-12, those decisions rely heavily on our ability to keep our school population safe. We watch regional infection data very closely to decide when and if this will be possible.

We are entering a precarious time of year full of family and community gatherings and travel which creates ideal conditions for the spread of COVID -19. Both the Cayuga and Onondaga County Health Departments are completely overwhelmed presently with the numbers of infections and the volume of contact tracing they are required to perform. This makes them slow to respond, delays the contact tracing process, and limits their ability to control community spread. While present conditions are cause for concern, we need to focus on what we can do as a school district and as a community.

So far we have been very fortunate in that, even with two forced closures and multiple students placed into mandatory quarantine, presently we have no evidence of any virus spread within our school buildings. In each case we have seen to date, infection happened outside of school. While this reinforces the effectiveness of the health and safety procedures already in place, it is the appropriate time to clarify our position on mask wearing at Skaneateles Schools. We are fortunate to have regional experts who reside within our own community. In consultation with Dr. Steven Thomas, he confirmed that regionally we are seeing an increase in both the numbers of tests administered and the number of COVID -19 positive test results. Dr. Thomas shared that as things are changing regionally, now is the time to be vigilant, to tighten procedures, and out of an abundance of caution, is in support of clarifying our position on required mask wearing.

Beginning Monday, November 2nd, 2020 masks will be required at all times for all students, faculty, and staff except while eating or taking safe and appropriate mask breaks. While this is consistent with current practice throughout our district in responding to the changing conditions throughout the region, clarifying our position on mask wearing can only help in maintaining the health and safety of everyone in our school community. All of our procedures are subject to review and we will continue to evolve our practice and watch regional data closely. I look forward to the time where these restrictions can be lifted and I thank you for your understanding that all of our actions are focused on maintaining the health and safety of everyone in our school community.

Stronger together,

Eric Knuth
Superintendent of Schools

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